United Nations S/PV.6045

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

6045th meeting

Tuesday, 16 December 2008, 11 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Sanader	(Croatia)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. He Yafei
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Miliband
	United States of America	Ms. Rice
	Viet Nam	Mr. Hoang Chi Trung

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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08-65213 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 11.20 a.m.

Expression of welcome to ministers

The President: At the outset of the meeting, I should like to acknowledge and welcome the presence in the Council Chamber of the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Her Excellency Ms. Condoleezza Rice; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov; the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, His Excellency the Right Honourable Mr. David Miliband, MP; and the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, His Excellency Mr. He Yafei.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/787, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

I welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

This meeting comes at the end of an eventful year, marked by a number of encouraging developments in the Middle East. Since the beginning of 2008, we have witnessed the evolution of a comprehensive, direct and result-oriented Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process within the framework set out last year in Annapolis.

We have to recognize that there is a political momentum to this process, which gives us reason to be hopeful. Today, the Security Council has the opportunity to acknowledge these achievements and express its appreciation and encouragement for the determined efforts of the parties and its support for the continuation of the process and the fulfilment of the Annapolis goals. I am confident that the draft resolution that the Council is about to adopt conveys that message.

I would also like to reiterate the belief that the ongoing process provides our best chance for peace. The parties have set in motion a momentum we cannot afford to lose; they deserve the full support of the Security Council on that journey. We have a shared and a clear goal: to turn into reality the vision of two States, a democratic and peaceful Palestine, living side by side with a democratic and secure Israel, and to advance the momentum towards a just, lasting, comprehensive peace for the Middle East.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: This is a very important meeting for the cause of peace in the Middle East and for the central role of the Security Council in achieving it. For the 13 months since Annapolis, Israelis and Palestinians have been negotiating continuously on all the core issues between them.

The Palestinian Authority has been pursuing genuine measures of self-empowerment in the West Bank, improving security and economic life for its citizens in the framework of increased Israeli-Palestinian partnership. The international community has been devoting new efforts with the parties to secure the implementation of Road Map commitments on the ground.

We had hoped by now to be marking the conclusion of a peace agreement and turning our sights towards its implementation. We all regret that this is not the case and we know we still face many hurdles, but a serious process is under way. We must ensure that what has been started is seen all the way through to its conclusion. We know what that conclusion must be. The occupation that began in 1967 must end. All people in the Middle East should be able to enjoy peace and full security. Palestinians must see the establishment of a State of Palestine, alongside Israel, to coexist with it in peace and security, and Israel and the Arab world must come to live together in a comprehensive regional peace.

As we enter 2009, we must stabilize the situation on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza and ensure that all tracks of the process are intensified. All of us — Israelis and Palestinians, the regional countries and the Arab League as whole, the Quartet, including the incoming United States Administration, and this

Council — must maintain our unity and redouble our efforts.

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am deeply and firmly committed to the goal of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1402 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative, and I hope the Council acts today to help set us firmly, finally and irreversibly on the path to peace in the Middle East.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): The situation today in the Middle East is very different than when President Bush came to office in 2001. At that time, the Camp David effort had collapsed. Israelis and Palestinians were in a vicious cycle of violence. Suicide bombers were murdering innocent Israelis in cafes and restaurants and at Passover seders, leaving the rest of the population living in constant fear. Israeli military incursions left scores of Palestinians dead and wounded, neighbourhoods destroyed and the economy in shambles. No image better captures that desperate time than the siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Yet, in spite of those tragedies, the cycle of violence continued. Each time a ray of hope penetrated the darkness, it was snuffed out by intolerance. Reforms within the Palestinian Authority in 2003 inspired hope that the Palestinians would finally have the leadership they deserved, and yet these reforms proved to be superficial and the hope proved to be deceptive. Palestinian elections in January 2005 and Israel's disengagement from Gaza later that year offered yet another opportunity for progress. But the victory of Hamas, the terrorist group committed to the destruction of Israel, in the 2006 elections that summer, and then the war in Lebanon ended that hope.

Finally, in 2007, after Hamas had usurped power in Gaza, it was clear to all that there was no alternative to President Bush's vision of a State of Palestine and a State of Israel living side by side in peace and security.

Building on this new dynamic, President Bush convened the Annapolis conference in November 2007, the first major Middle East peace conference in 16 years and the only one of its kind to be held on United States soil. Representatives of over 50 countries, including 14 Arab States, sat with the Israeli Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Defence Minister to pursue a different future for the region. Since that day, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have bravely demonstrated their commitment to peace through continuous bilateral and substantial negotiations on all the core issues. They made the strategic choice to, as President Bush has said, defeat an ideology of hatred with an ideology of hope.

The support of the United States and the international community for the parties' efforts has not been sustained by false hope or ignorance of the challenges, but by a genuine belief in the sincerity of the parties' commitment, in the progress they have made and continue to make and in the prospects for success if they continue down this path. The United States has a national interest in the conclusion of a final treaty, and it is in the long-term interest of Israel to provide a more hopeful society for Palestinians. The establishment of the State of Palestine is long overdue, and there should be an end to the occupation that began in 1967.

Above all, as our Egyptian friends reminded the Quartet yesterday, this is a bilateral process, and the two parties will have to conclude a final agreement. But it is incumbent upon the international community to provide support to their efforts and to create the political context within which their negotiations can prosper.

It is for that reason that we are gathered here today, to consider a draft resolution sponsored by the United States and the Russian Federation to chart the way forward. It builds upon the work of the international community through the Quartet, and I commend my colleagues from the United Nations, the European Union and the Russian Federation for their service in the pursuit of peace.

This draft resolution describes the contours of the negotiations and defines the role of the international community, which will prevent a return to violence and the hopelessness of a second intifada, when peace was a distant dream. It has several elements.

First, it confirms the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations and endorses the parties' brave efforts. Brinksmanship and dramatic last-minute

attempts to forge a lasting peace have not succeeded in the past. There is no substitute for the Annapolis process, and stagnation is not an option.

In their historic briefing for the Quartet on 9 November, President Abbas and Foreign Minister Livni described their shared vision of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel, and pledged to continue their negotiation, even in times of political transition. They also described the understanding that governs their negotiation and confirmed the comprehensive nature of their effort, which is to build peace, both from the top down and from the bottom up.

The Annapolis process has advanced under the leadership of President Abbas, Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni, and these advances must be preserved and built upon. The commitment to negotiations is not a matter of lip service. It is about genuine commitment to the two-State solution and the necessary foundations of trust between the parties to turn that solution into reality.

As the Quartet affirmed yesterday, lasting peace will result from mutually reinforcing efforts on the political track, on building the institutions of a Palestinian State and on improving conditions on the ground. None of those tracks can succeed in isolation. As negotiations proceed, Israel and the Palestinians must ensure that life improves for millions of Palestinians. The international conferences in Paris, Bethlehem and Berlin were critical in supporting those efforts.

The United States has become the largest bilateral donor to the Palestinians. We continue to support the Palestinian Authority with direct budget assistance, funding for high-impact projects and the promotion of efforts to link security, governance and economic development.

Secondly, the draft resolution reiterates the importance of fulfilling obligations under the Road Map. Neither party should undertake any activity that contravenes Road Map obligations or prejudices the final status negotiations. The views of the United States have been made very clear in that regard, especially in connection with settlement activity. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority has an absolute obligation to dismantle the infrastructure of terror in its territories, reform its security services and end incitement.

Progress is being made, but it is incomplete. Sustained political will, as well as international support, is required. The peace and economic growth that resulted from Israeli and Palestinian security cooperation in Jenin and from international support is in stark contrast to the suffering that blighted that city in 2003. In recent weeks, Palestinian security forces have deployed to Hebron and have performed well in a volatile environment.

Thirdly, the draft resolution underscores that peace will be built upon mutual recognition, freedom from violence and terror, the two-State solution and previous agreements and obligations. It highlights the enduring importance of the Quartet principles and codifies the Security Council's backing of those fundamental principles. The threat of extremism and terrorism posed by Hamas is a threat to the Annapolis process and to the fulfilment of legitimate Palestinian aspirations. That is important to note.

Fourthly, the draft resolution underlines that the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be aligned with efforts towards broader regional peace. The Arab Peace Initiative is a historic proposal in that regard. As Arab States should reach out to Israel, so should Israel reach out to Arab States.

The negotiations born at Annapolis and described in the draft resolution give me confidence that the goal of two independent and democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security is not just a vision but a commitment of the parties and of the international community. There can be no turning back the clock. We should only go forward from here. We have to continue on the chosen path. That chosen path will finally bring for the Israelis the peace and security that can only come from living side by side in reconciliation with a democratic neighbour of Palestine. That path forward will finally give to the people of Palestine the dignity and the humanity that can only come from living in their independent and sovereign State.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today we are adding an intermediate element to an important stage in the very detailed work that has been done in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations since last year's meeting at Annapolis. The process has not been easy, and many factors have significantly complicated it. But the fact that the parties have begun in earnest to address the major issues for them is in fact

a real step forward. We must secure and continue that momentum towards peace. It is also essential to ensure continuity and to continue the negotiations while building on what has been achieved. The Quartet of Middle East mediators participating at yesterday's meeting all expressed those same views, as did representatives of the League of Arab States during contact, in New York.

We have a serious task before us today, namely, to strengthen the continuity and irreversibility of the political process through a resolution of the Security Council and give that approach the strength of international law. The adoption of the draft resolution before us will, of course, not guarantee that the situation will evolve only in the right direction. Much will depend on whether it is possible for Israelis and Palestinians themselves to develop and foster the necessary preconditions to move ahead successfully.

Of particular importance are the draft resolution's provisions calling for the full implementation by both parties of their obligations under the Road Map. In that regard we have in mind, of course, primarily the security situation, not allowing any terrorist acts, ending settlement activity and lifting the blockade and restrictions on movement.

The draft resolution also underscores the crucial need to allow the Arab Peace Initiative to work effectively. It is especially important in the present circumstances to restore the territorial and political unity of Palestinian national administration as quickly as possible. That is essential for strengthening the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and for ensuring the viability of future final arrangements in the framework of that dialogue.

The Israeli and Palestinian parties face a very complex problem. It requires political will and certainly courage. Members of the Quartet, meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh with President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, became convinced that the negotiators have shown those qualities. We expect that those who will continue the negotiations in the future will also demonstrate those important qualities.

Of course, progress is impossible without the active support on the part of the international community. Today's meeting demonstrates that such support will in fact continue to be extended to the parties as they aspire to peace. Russia will make its contribution to the collective efforts to ensure peaceful and sustainable development in the region. Only by working together and by respecting the internationally recognized legal basis can we achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful resolution.

Along with our partners, we will take every step necessary to ensure that the international meeting on the Middle East that has been scheduled for 2009 in Moscow marks as an important step forward. We shall also work to ensure that it serves to accelerate the process to reach an agreement, which is the goal of the draft resolution before the Security Council today.

Mr. Miliband (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes this debate and the prospect of a new Security Council resolution on this matter, the first since 2004. The violence, intensity and grievances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have global ramifications. Their resolution is the proper business of the Council.

The Security Council does not lack consistent policy on the Middle East. Although our resolutions have been sporadic, they have gained significance and status from their scarcity. Resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) ring out as the rallying points for peace. It is right that, after a year of intensive activity, we take stock, add a new number to the line of previous resolutions and, most important, resolve to use 2009 with determination to make progress within the framework of the draft resolution now before the Council.

The starting point for the United Kingdom is the concerns of the people of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. They are tired and fearful — tired of conflict but also of false promises; fearful of each other but more fearful of the future. One year after Annapolis, the bilateral discussions have been detailed and serious, and the Syrian track has been launched. But cynicism and pessimism have grown. Rockets from Gaza land further into Israel. The Israeli restrictions, in particular on food and medicine, cause acute suffering in Gaza.

There are plenty of people ready to say that there can be no two-State solution. I applaud the determination of Secretary Rice not to join them. The Annapolis process has not delivered a Palestinian State but the absence of an Annapolis process would have left us much worse off. Secretary Rice has spoken plainly and powerfully of the stakes, the vision and the

necessary steps. Now we have to follow her and help the parties to take these steps.

The draft resolution before us is significant for its espousal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. It emphasizes the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. The United Kingdom welcomes this emphasis. The responsibility for a resolution of the Middle East conflict does not fall just to Israel and the Palestinians, though they must lead the process. It falls to every State in the region, for the only sustainable peace must be a 23-State solution, not just a two-State solution: 22 Arab States and Israel living side by side in security. We welcome the recent reiteration by the Arab League on behalf of its member States that the Arab world wants formally to end the conflict and establish normal relations with Israel. We believe that the outlines of that peace are clear and can command consensus: recognition and respect from Arab States for Israel and a Palestinian State based on 1967 borders with a just settlement for refugees and Jerusalem the capital of both States, Israel and Palestine.

There will need to be brave decisions on all sides, above all by the bilateral partners in the negotiations. For Israel, this means fulfilling its Road Map commitments, notably on illegal settlement, and improving conditions for Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza. For Palestinians, this means finding a way to reunite around negotiations and non-violence. And those who would torpedo the process must know that we are determined not to allow them to succeed. Hamas must end its rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, abandon violence and demonstrate their commitment to the political process by moving towards the Quartet principles.

The United Kingdom welcomes operative paragraph 4 of the draft resolution on the development of Palestinian capacity and the development of the institutions of a Palestinian State. We believe this is vital. The political process and the situation on the ground are inseparable. They need to be mutually reinforcing. Better security forces for the Palestinians does not just mean better lives for them — it means more security for Israel. We applaud the efforts of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayad to make this a reality and we are determined to play our part in supporting them.

Our role here today is not just to adopt a resolution; it is to challenge all those with an interest in the region to join us in 2009. The perils of inertia are clear: inactivity and confrontation are the recruiting sergeants for extremism from Mogadishu to Manchester. The gains of effective action are the opposite: the reversal of four decades in which the Middle East has been destabilized and the world made less safe. That is why the United Kingdom pledges to do all in its power not just to support this draft resolution, but to progress its implementation.

Mr. He Yafei (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At a time when the Middle East question is at an important juncture, the holding of this meeting of the Security Council is of paramount importance. Since the Annapolis process was launched in November last year, difficult political negotiations started between Palestine and Israel. The international community has made tireless efforts to promote and push forward the peace process. However, regrettably, the negotiations have failed to achieve major breakthroughs in line with the set timetable. At the present moment, the Middle East situation is not only blessed with opportunities for further improvement, but also confronts a variety of uncertainties and risks. It is the common challenge facing the international community to ensure that that negotiating process forges ahead and achieves substantive progress. We believe that today's Security Council meeting will play a positive role in taking up this common challenge.

China has consistently maintained that the Security Council should play its due role in handling the Middle East question. Under the current circumstances, which support the adoption of a resolution by the Security Council on the question of the Middle East, we welcome the draft resolution submitted by the United States and Russia, which calls for support to Palestine and Israel in pushing forward their political negotiations. It is our consistent view that political negotiations represent the sole viable and correct path towards enduring peace in the Middle East. In these new circumstances, we expect both parties to rapidly build momentum for negotiations. We expect both parties to work on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as the principle of land for peace in order to realize at an early date, through negotiation, the prospect of two countries living side by side in peace.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently expressed, China, too, expects 2009 to be a harvest year for the Middle East peace process. We are full of

expectations. However, we have also come to realize that the road ahead promises to be tortuous. The most urgent task facing us is to make sure that both parties implement in earnest their respective obligations and refrain from taking any action that might undermine mutual trust or prejudge the outcome of the negotiations. The construction of settlements by Israel in the West Bank and its imposition of embargoes and blockades in Gaza are not conducive to creating an enabling environment for negotiations.

China expresses its deep concern over the humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza. We call upon the international community to continue to provide a variety of assistance and to actively support Palestine in its capacity-building and in accelerating its economic development.

A lasting peace in the Middle East is by necessity a comprehensive peace. Realizing peace between Syria and Israel as well as between Lebanon and Israel represents an integral part of the Middle East peace process. We expect Syria and Israel as well as Lebanon and Israel to improve their bilateral relations through peace talks while we call upon the international community to beef up its diplomatic efforts in a practical way. The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative has great potential indeed and should be built upon.

The Quartet mechanism plays an important role in promoting a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question. At the same time, we expect the mechanism to exert greater efforts. We support the Secretary-General's active engagement in the activities of the Quartet. At the same time, we expect the mechanism to strengthen its regular communication and coordination with the Security Council. China is ready and willing to work with the international community in playing a constructive role in seeking a proper settlement of the Middle East question at an early date and realizing a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the region.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to extend my thanks to the President of the Security Council for his initiative to convene this meeting, and I welcome his presence. We would also like to recognize the presence of the ministers and the Secretary-General at this important meeting.

This meeting is being held to consider a draft resolution on the question of Palestine, and we hope that it will represent a reversal of the behaviour of the Council over the past few years. Libya believes that the Security Council should consider and, according to the letter of the Charter, decide this question, which has represented a continuous threat to peace and security for more than six decades.

This problem has been accompanied by tremendous suffering of the Palestinian people and all other peoples of the region. Violations of human rights, unprecedented breaches of international law, remarkable for both their breadth and duration, continue. It was the cause of many wars and has led to a continuous cycle of violence.

Despite all of this, the Council has for years refrained from taking explicit and decisive action on this question. Even in cases in which the Security Council has taken decisions and adopted resolutions, these resolutions have never been implemented due to the lack of genuine political will by some for a just solution that respects international law, rejects aggression and occupation and condemns the oppression of people.

Libya welcomes, on principle, the attempt to adopt a Security Council resolution on the question of Palestine. At the same time, it believes that generalization of the question, deliberate ambiguity and disregard for confronting breaches of international law do not serve peace as much as they hinder it.

The aggressor and occupier could interpret the text as a form of acceptance of its behaviour and policy, which, in turn, reinforces such behaviour. The victims could see this as proof that the international community is not serious, is biased and has double standards, which pushes them to further frustration and despair, with all of the repercussions.

This year, the situation in the region has plumbed unprecedented depths of deterioration on the ground. Since 27 November 2007, the date of the launch of the Annapolis conference, the practices of the Israeli occupiers have continued to escalate. The killing and the detentions have continued, settlement construction has intensified, the siege of the Gaza Strip has worsened and the number of checkpoints and barriers in the West Bank, which make daily life unbearable and normal human activity very difficult, has increased.

Furthermore, the demolition of houses has continued as has the building of the separation wall, most of it on Palestinian territory. In fact, the whole world has witnessed aggression by terrorist and extremist settlers against the Palestinians. This violence has even extended to Arabs within the Green Line.

We have recently heard some statements by Israeli officials that provide us with further proof that behind the settlers' violence, lies, in fact, an official acceptance and encouragement both inside or outside the Green Line. All of these acts constitute explicit breaches and violations of international law, the Road Map requirements and the Annapolis joint understandings.

Does not the statement by the Human Rights Council's rapporteur to the Security Council state that we should move quickly to apply specific criteria protecting the Palestinians who are facing collective punishment by policies that are basically crimes against humanity? Is it not logical and clear that the minimum for reaching a just solution would be to condemn these practices as well as to put an end to them?

Libya is very eager to bring about peace and has worked, and continues to work, for peace and believes that these Israeli practices cannot represent a way to reach peace. We also believe that ignoring and disregarding such practices is an unintended invitation to continue such behaviour.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his introductory statement.

Our meeting today is, indeed, an event, as we are preparing to adopt a draft resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian question, something which has not happened since May 2004. Throughout these past four-and-a-half years of silence, France has continued to urge the Security Council to play a more active role in the Middle East.

For this reason, we welcome the fact that the Council, which has the mandate to guarantee the maintenance of peace and security, will be able to express itself today. We would like to thank the sponsors of the draft resolution, the last paragraph of which reminds us that the Council will remain seized of the matter, thus opening the way towards its playing a stronger role.

The European Union (EU), of which France holds the Presidency, has just outlined its vision of the peace process in a declaration adopted by the European Council meeting of 11 to 12 December. I quote:

> "The Middle East peace process will remain a top priority for the European Union in 2009. A just, lasting and comprehensive peace is urgently needed. The EU will do all it can both practically and politically to drive the peace process forward next year, working closely with our international partners and in particular in the Quartet, to promote a solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict on the basis of two States, living in peace and security. The EU will also support talks between Israel and Syria and, if possible Lebanon. The European Council welcomes efforts to reinvigorate the Arab Peace Initiative, including the Arab Foreign Ministers' letter to President-elect Barak Obama, as part of a comprehensive approach for a peace between Israel and the whole region. We urge the United States, under its new Administration, to join us in making the Middle East Peace Process an immediate and central priority."

In my national capacity, I would like to underscore a number of points.

First of all, concerning our belief, as reflected in the draft resolution, that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process, launched since the Annapolis conference, must be forcefully supported in order to reach a comprehensive peace agreement as soon as possible. This agreement should provide for the establishment of a State of Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza which is viable, independent, democratic and sovereign, living in peace and security, side by side with Israel, with secure and recognized borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, as the President of the French Republic stated in his address to the Knesset on 23 June 2008.

In this regard, France urgently calls for inter-Palestinian reconciliation. To this end, we support the Egyptian mediation efforts and will support every Government that respects the commitments made by the Palestine Liberation Organization, resolutely supports peace negotiations with Israel and whose

policies and actions reflect the principles of the Quartet.

The second key element is that France, like its partners in the European Union, subscribes to a comprehensive approach towards resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict, as reflected in the draft resolution before us. In this regard, we welcome the Arab Peace Initiative, which we feel provides a solid and relevant basis for peace in the Middle East. It will also make it possible to include the Syrian and Lebanese tracks in our consideration, which strikes us as being essential.

We must now translate into action the opportunity which that Initiative represents by making it operational. To do so, we are ready to work with all concerned actors on a phased approach in order to attain the great objectives of the Initiative. One might thus envisage the implementation by all parties of confidence-building measures, which would make it possible to launch a positive dynamic.

Trust is actually an essential element in this process. Indeed, it has to do with the third element I wish to underscore, which is that rapid and meaningful change on the ground is necessary. The draft resolution thus highlights the importance of respecting the commitments made in the context of the Road Map. In that regard, and while a great deal remains to be done in order for terrorism and violence to cease, one can only recognize and welcome the significant efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority in the areas of security, governance and the rule of law, especially in Jenin and Nablus.

We believe that this progress calls for reciprocal gestures from Israel, starting with the issue of land — land for security, peace in exchange for land. As the Council knows, that is one of the foundations of the peace process. As the European Union has done on numerous occasions, France wishes to remind Israel that it is necessary and urgent to put an end to settlement activities, including natural growth and including in East Jerusalem. Any other policy would tarnish the credibility of the negotiators and would adversely affect the outcome of the negotiations, which the draft resolution urges the parties not to do.

Of course, the parties are not alone in bearing responsibilities. It is equally desirable for the international community as a whole to mobilize in support of the Palestinian Authority, as the draft resolution invites it to. France will keep its commitments on this point. It will closely monitor the follow-up to the donors conference for the Palestinian State held in Paris last December in order to enable the Palestinian Authority to strengthen its institutional capacities.

If ultimately there is a message that France wishes to convey on every occasion — even if it is not reflected in the draft resolution submitted to the Council — it is the absolute need for respect for humanitarian law. This unreservedly prohibits terrorist acts that blindly strike civilian populations, such as the attacks and the firing of rockets against Israel. As the Council knows, it also prohibits any form of collective punishment and calls on the parties to a conflict to allow free access to humanitarian aid. These rules must provide guidance in addressing the situation in Gaza. Let us not forget that.

France will support the draft resolution being considered today. We hope that it will allow us to make progress on the difficult road towards peace. In this perspective, we hope that the European Union will stand alongside the parties, in particular through its contribution to the Quartet. Finally, when the time has come, France and the European Union will be ready to contribute, along with the whole of the international community, to the international arrangements from which Israelis and Palestinians hope to benefit in order to guarantee peace.

Mr. Hoang Chi Trung (Viet Nam): On behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East. This meeting once again demonstrates our joint commitment to addressing a very important issue of international peace and security, namely the question of Palestine. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his statement.

The Middle East peace process began 17 years ago in Madrid on the basis of United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. It was launched officially between the Palestinian and Israeli parties 15 years ago in Washington, with the signing of the Oslo Accords, and was revitalized once again with so much hope and so many expectations last November in Annapolis.

Over the last two decades or so, we have seen so much hope and so many expectations, but also so much frustration and despair. In the meantime, the

Palestinians continue to live with so much suffering under the illegal occupation of Israel.

The Middle East peace process now again faces renewed opportunities and challenges. At this critical juncture, my delegation is particularly heartened by the current surge in diplomacy for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. It is amply demonstrated by the continued commitments of both Israel and Palestine to negotiations on final status issues guided by the Annapolis Joint Understanding and the Road Map. We are also witness to the strong support of the international community at a series of international conferences in Paris, Bethlehem, London and Berlin for the development of a viable Palestinian State.

It is also worth noting the tangible progress reached between Israel and relevant parties on matters of mutual concerns, the homegrown efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority to proceed with preparations for its statehood, and the proactive mediation efforts of the Quartet, the Leagues of Arab States and regional countries.

There are various favourable developments in the region as well, such as the indirect talks between Syria and Israel, promising steps in the Lebanese-Israeli dialogue and the normalization of relations between Lebanon and Syria, as well as growing stability in Lebanon since the signing of the Doha Agreement.

There are, therefore, enough reasons to be hopeful that these positive developments could eventually crystallize into an enabling environment of mutual trust and peaceful coexistence, in which all nations in the region could share the peace dividends. It would also enable the vision of an independent and viable State of Palestine side by side in harmony with its neighbours to be materialized.

My delegation remains cognizant of the fact that such progress, although doubly prized in light of the difficult situation in the past two years, may have little effect unless it is further consolidated into concrete determination and the commitment of Israel and Palestine to satisfactorily and peacefully address issues of common interests across various political, security, socio-economic, human rights and humanitarian domains. We are fully convinced that all the parties concerned must combine efforts and exert genuine political will to keep the peace process on track and avoid repeating past scenarios where attempts would boost optimism only to lead to another cr letdown.

At this defining moment when the prospect regional peace are growing and hopes for a pe settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict re-emerged, we urge all parties to exercise restraint and refrain from any step or statement may undermine the peace process and prejudi final status negotiations.

Further concerted efforts should be ma achieve more tangible improvements on the grou the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Se Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the pri of land for peace, the Madrid terms of refe adopted at the Peace Conference on the Middle the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map to M Peace and the Annapolis outcome.

We support the efforts of the United Nation Quartet, the League of Arab States, regional cou and the international community to help reali two-State vision and to reach a just and compreh solution in the Middle East. In this connectio welcome the meeting of the Quartet and the Lea Arab States held yesterday on the compound United Nations. We hope that the coming meeti the Quartet in Moscow will provide greater impe move the Middle East peace process further ahe all tracks.

In conclusion, my country wishes to reaffi unwavering support for a just and compreh solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and f realization by the Palestinian people of inalienable rights, including their right to determination and sovereignty in an independen sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): We too thank Sir, for organizing this ministerial meeting o situation in the Middle East. We warmly welcom Secretary of State of the United States, the Fo Minister of the Russian Federation, the Fo Secretary of the United Kingdom and the Vice Mi of Foreign Affairs of China who have joined us to

We also wish to express our thanks to the U States of America and the Russian Federatio presenting the draft resolution before us today. worth noting that, if the draft resolution is adopt

will be the first time in nearly five years that the Council has substantively pronounced itself on the Middle East.

The draft resolution recalls two important decisions. The first dates back to 7 May 2003, when former Secretary-General Kofi Annan sent a letter to the Security Council transmitting a text of the Quartet entitled "A performance-based road map to a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict". The Road Map stated:

> "A settlement, negotiated between the parties, will result in the emergence of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. The settlement will resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and end the occupation that began in 1967, based on the foundations of the Madrid Conference [and] the principle of land for peace" (*S/2003/529, annex, p. 2*).

The Road Map continued:

> "This initiative is a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks." (*Ibid.*)

The second decision before us today was taken at a meeting held on 27 November 2007 in Annapolis, Maryland. United States President George W. Bush summed up the outcome in a joint understanding between the parties that stated:

> "We express our determination to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples; to usher in a new era of peace, based on freedom, security, justice, dignity, respect and mutual recognition; to propagate a culture of peace and non-violence; to confront terrorism and incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis. In furtherance of the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, we agree to immediately launch good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty, resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception, as specified in previous agreements."

Our concern is that, since the Quartet declaration five years ago, the situation in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine, has not improved. Instead, the illegal occupation of Palestine that began in 1967 has intensified. Palestinians continue to face hardships compounded by the financial embargo, the expansion of Israeli settlements and the building of the illegal separation wall, as well as by restrictions on movement and access, which are interrupted by more than 600 roadblocks. Twelve months after the Annapolis meeting, political negotiations have not produced any tangible results.

The draft resolution before us is not perfect, because it ignores many significant issues that the Council must address. These include the continuing illegal settlement activity in the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. In Hebron, Israeli settlers have attacked Palestinian homes and farms. Violence against Palestinian and Israeli civilians has not ended. Yet, my delegation will support this draft resolution, because it recommits the parties to the obligations to which they have previously agreed. We continue to encourage both Israelis and Palestinians to persist with negotiations to achieve the goal of a viable Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

If adopted, this draft resolution will face two crucial tests. The first will be whether the parties will implement its provisions, and the second will be whether the Council will ensure that its resolutions are implemented. If this draft resolution were to be ignored, that would further erode the credibility of the Council.

We also hope that the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, whose importance is noted in the draft resolution, will be taken as a serious contribution to bringing about peace in the Middle East. The Arab Initiative spells out even clearer and more specific affirmations expected of both Israel and the Arab countries.

The Arab Initiative calls upon Israel to affirm the following: a full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the lines of 4 June 1967, as well as from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the South of Lebanon; the achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, to be agreed upon in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III); and acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian State on the Palestinian territories occupied since 4 June 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as

its capital. Consequently, the Arab countries affirm that they will consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, enter into a peace agreement with Israel and provide security for all States in the region, and establish normal relations with Israel in the context of a comprehensive peace.

The Palestinian people have now been homeless for 60 years. Generation upon generation of Palestinian children have never had a home other than the ghettos and camps that they have occupied throughout the world. Those Palestinians who stayed behind have had to endure 40 years of illegal occupation with its untold miseries. In the Gaza Strip, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians live under a complete blockade, with bare essentials that keep them alive for yet another day.

For the past few months, my delegation has recommended that the Council invite Mr. Tony Blair, Quartet Representative and former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, to brief the Security Council about his efforts in the occupied areas. Although we will soon leave the Council, we hope that Mr. Blair will still accept its invitation and come early in the new year. It is important that the Council hear first-hand about the suffering of the Palestinian people. Perhaps that will inspire the Council to adopt a comprehensive draft resolution next time. For now, the draft resolution before us will have to suffice.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes your presence, Sir, here in New York to preside over this important meeting. My delegation also thanks the Secretary-General for his statement and welcomes the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the United States, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom, as well as the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of China and the Deputy Secretary-General.

Costa Rica welcomes any initiative to promote peace in the Middle East. However, we are equally convinced that the proliferation of efforts to that end does not absolve the Security Council of its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. While we value the work of the Quartet, it is also certain that most Members of the Organization have received little information on its work. Along with other delegations, in particular that of South Africa, we have repeatedly asked the Quartet to inform the Council of its actions with the aim of complementing efforts, as we have supported more robust action on the part of the Security Council instead of the marginal role it has played in recent years.

A draft resolution has been submitted to us for adoption at the outcome of this meeting. We shall support the draft resolution, in spite of the fact that we would have preferred it to include, in particular, a reference to the tragic humanitarian situation in Gaza caused by a response that, in our opinion, has been disproportionate to the terrorist attacks carried out against Israeli territory. We would also have preferred to have held a thorough discussion of the text and regret that it was not possible. However, we believe that the Council's action on the Middle East, which we have urged throughout the year, is highly positive.

My delegation is convinced that there is a close relationship between the political prospects for peace and the socio-economic and humanitarian situation on the ground. The Council cannot ignore that relationship. The many actions contravening the Council's resolutions and the Road Map hinder progress, as do calls for the elimination of the State of Israel. My delegation considers it absolutely unacceptable that Members of this Organization should refer to others by denying their existence as a State and threatening their right to exist.

Costa Rica is concerned by what we hear almost every day from such entities of the United Nations system as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Bank.

Since April 2008, the number of obstacles impeding the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank has grown. The number of illegal settlements has also increased significantly since the Annapolis conference. The efforts of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and of the Special Envoy of the Quartet to promote economic prosperity in the Palestinian territory and to improve the standard of living of the population will not succeed unless the downward trend is reversed.

For all of those reasons, Costa Rica would have preferred a draft resolution that identified the core issues of the conflict by name. We hope that, at some point in the future, the Council will analyse and

pronounce itself on the parties' compliance with their obligations under the Road Map, Security Council resolutions and international law, in particular international humanitarian and human rights law.

My delegation supports today's initiative in the hope that it will provide a new impetus to the peace process in order to achieve the definitive, specific, verifiable and sustainable agreements by 2009 that eluded us in 2008 and which will lead to the peace that has eluded the Palestinians and Israelis for six decades.

For my delegation, the comments made by the President of the Council of 5 December represents a step forward in the Council's actions with regard to the specific issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that undermine the credibility of the parties in the peace process. However, we believe it necessary for the Council to take further action in the form of a decision, which is more than an oral statement, to lend new momentum to the peace process and to address the hurdles that have prevented the bilateral negotiating processes from bearing fruit.

Finally, we welcome the two initiatives taken this month and we foster the hope that they herald a change in the prevailing practice that will enable the Council to pronounce itself in a timely manner with respect to events on the ground, as is the case for the other situations of which the Council is seized.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing and presiding over today's meeting. The presence of ministers and the Secretary-General, whom we respectfully welcome, attests to its importance.

It has been said that the situation in the Middle East, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian question, is certainly one of the most complex and one of the most paradoxical items on the agenda. It is a paradox because, despite the unanimous view that a lasting solution must be found, the parties and the international community are finding it difficult to identify a political solution that is acceptable to everyone.

As has been recalled in the Council, several initiatives have been taken to that end, including the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative which is still awaiting full implementation. Much hope was therefore placed in the Annapolis conference, and the agreements reached there laid a solid foundation for a timely and satisfactory solution to the conflict. In assessing the outcome, it must be acknowledged once again that we are far from having reached the goals set at Annapolis, although there has been no lack of follow-up action in support of the process. The December 2007 Paris donor conference and the initiatives of Egypt and Yemen can be cited in that regard.

Regrettably, real obstacles still block the road to peace, including the ongoing Israeli settlement policies in occupied Palestinian territories, an embargo on Gaza that has led to a disturbing humanitarian tragedy and the firing of rockets by Hamas into Israel, among others. For all those reasons, my delegation supports the Security Council's initiative to send a message of encouragement and support to the parties that calls on them to keep alive and well the spirit of the Annapolis peace process by working to establish a State of Palestine side by side and at peace with Israel.

To that end, we urge the parties to continue their frank dialogue and to make bold concessions in order to settle pending issues. They must also strengthen confidence-building measures and continue to respect the truce between Hamas and Israel. All initiatives, including those of the Quartet, to help the parties to overcome their differences, should be encouraged, in particular those aimed at strengthening Palestinian unity and providing assistance to Palestinian refugees. The Security Council itself has an important part to play, and it must play it fully. First of all, it must take all the steps that it can under the Charter in order to ensure that its resolutions on the matter are implemented.

The vision of a State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in complete peace and security is not utopian, nor is it a negation of Israeli security. Rather, it would ensure a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Burkina Faso believes in this idea quite sincerely and would urge the parties and all the actors concerned to work to achieve this legitimate goal.

In Annapolis, great hope was born on the road to settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because we and the parties are aware that the Annapolis process is one of the best opportunities to date to resolve the dispute. Given the purpose of the present debate, which is to press negotiations begun in Annapolis in order to make them irreversible, we support the draft resolution that has been put to us to that end.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): There is perhaps no international issue more important to my country, Indonesia, and closer to our hearts than the effort to find a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to bring to an end the occupation that began in 1967.

We have therefore consistently supported efforts to achieve such a settlement based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace. Thus, we have lauded the commitment of the parties under the Annapolis peace process. We have recognized the vital role that the Quartet has been playing in the promotion of solutions to the conflict in the Middle East acceptable to all parties. And not least, we have been persistent in recognizing the contributions of countries in the region and of the League of Arab States to the Middle East peace efforts, including through the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

Unfortunately, the Security Council's recent record on the issue has been less than sterling. Notwithstanding the regular monthly meetings on the issue when the situation on the ground demands it, time and again, the Council has been unable to pronounce itself collectively and with a single voice. The Council's silence on the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine, has been deafening.

Today provides a welcome change. Our meeting today provides positive encouragement to all the parties to continue and redouble their efforts to engage in vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations and to make every effort to achieve a meaningful and result-oriented outcome. In this connection, the draft resolution before the Council today makes clear the need for the parties to refrain from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of those negotiations. Thus, it is imperative that the Egyptian-brokered cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel be maintained.

Above all, it is essential that Israel immediately lift the closure of the Gaza crossings. The civilian population in the Gaza Strip is enduring hardships and difficulties that are unacceptable. Their plight must be urgently addressed. Not least, Israel must immediately end its illegal settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Indeed, the challenge is to find a way to ensure that there is no gap between the peace efforts and the situation on the ground. ... peace efforts consolidate and gather pace, there ... be commensurate positive developments on the g... The dividends of peace must be felt.

This perspective is the right one, not ... because there has been too much sufferin... sacrifice, but also because improvements i... situation on the ground will, in turn, reinfor... momentum in the negotiations. We need to tra... the all-too-familiar cycle of escalating violence ... virtuous cycle of dialogue, reconciliation ... cooperation. In this regard, we attach great impo... to international efforts to develop and stre... Palestine's national institutions, as is recognized ... draft resolution before the Council today.

A truly comprehensive and lasting peace ... Middle East requires a solution not only to the c... between Israel and Palestine, but also on the ... Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. On the Israel-Le... track, much remains to be done to realize the goa... permanent ceasefire and a long-term soluti... envisioned by Security Council resolution 1701 (... Negotiations on the Israel-Syria track have long ... inactive. However, signs of reinvigoration th... indirect talks are discernible. Indonesia wish... underscore that a comprehensive peace in the M... East requires progress on those tracks based ... relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The Council's coming together today cou... be more timely. We believe that this meeting a... outcome offer the potential to consolidate the ... process and indeed provide a platform for f... progress. Not least, it signals that the Council, ... again, is shouldering its Charter-mand... responsibilities. The Security Council must and ... can exert a positive influence on the Middle East ... process.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spa...*): Mr. President, first and foremost, I would like to ... you for your presence today in the Security C... and, in turn, would like to thank the Deputy Secr... General and the Secretary of State of the United S... the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Ru... Federation, the Secretary of State for Foreign ... Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom ... the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of China.

Panama welcomes the convening of this m... to consider the joint United States-Russian Fede...

initiative of submitting for the consideration of this Council a draft resolution on the situation in the Middle East. Two days from now, the Security Council will hold an open debate on this same subject. Therefore, on this occasion, we shall limit ourselves to commenting on the draft resolution before the Council.

At first glance, the text under consideration appears lacking in substance. However, a closer reading of the text shows that it sets forth with sufficient accuracy the various issues that are part of this conflict. The references to previous Security Council resolutions on the subject, to the obligation of the parties to comply with the provisions of the Road Map, to the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and to the ongoing bilateral negotiations process between Israelis and Palestinians that began in Annapolis are a reflection of this Council's support for the peace process in the Middle East, as well as for the objectives of the Council that must be met, namely an end to Israeli occupation of all Arab territories held since 1967, including the Syrian Golan, and the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State, living in peace and security with its neighbours, and in particular with Israel.

For Panama, the principal objective of this draft resolution is to provide an impetus for the peace process in the Middle East. Our delegation is of the view that the text under consideration meets that objective. Therefore, we shall be voting in favour of this text.

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would begin by expressing our appreciation to Secretary of State Rice and Foreign Minister Lavrov for this welcome American-Russian initiative that will enable us to end this meeting by adopting a resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Speaking up once again after a long silence and, we hope, in one voice, the Security Council is reminding the peoples concerned that the international community as a whole remains concerned about their fate. In recalling in its draft resolution the guidelines for the bilateral negotiations under way, the Council is reconfirming its responsibility to support the process until the goal shared by all — the end of the conflict and the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, living side by side with Israel in peace and security within secure and recognized borders — is reached.

Today, 13 months after the Annapolis conference, for the first time in eight years there is sufficient momentum to reach the peace agreement awaited for more than 60 years. Maintaining that momentum and the future of the two-State solution continues to require our attention and commitment on several levels.

First, the intensified bilateral negotiations pursued by the Israelis and Palestinians bear witness to considerable political investment on the part of the parties, particularly in their resistance of the repeated attempts of extremists on both sides to derail the negotiations. We can only welcome the confirmation by the parties themselves that that this political dynamic is now irreversible. More than ever before, the negotiations need full domestic and international support, regardless of the outcome of the period of political transition now under way.

At the domestic level, support for the negotiation process will require above all concrete and visible improvements in the situation on the ground. In the West Bank, recent progress in the economic and, above all, security fields demonstrates the benefits of the political programme of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, as well as the mutual benefits of increased cooperation on the part of the Israeli authorities. Alongside the release of Palestinian prisoners, these results strengthen mutual confidence and point to the road to be followed; they should encourage Palestinians and Israelis alike to step up their efforts to meet their obligations.

Recent events have made such progress all the more urgent. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, ongoing Israeli settlement activity is alarming. Belgium notes that the continued settlement activity has been unanimously condemned because it is clearly and completely contraindicated by the stated desire to establish the mutual confidence necessary to the peace process. Above all, however, it is illegal and jeopardizes the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. The violence deliberately committed by extremist settlers against Israeli law enforcement agencies and, above all, against Palestinian civilians strengthens our concerns even furthers. We therefore call on the Israeli authorities to freeze settlement activity forthwith and to ensure that the violence does not go unpunished.

After five months of calm and hope in the Gaza Strip, the humanitarian situation of its population continues to deteriorate and is now catastrophic. Rockets are again being fired into southern Israel, and there is a real danger that the violent downward spiral may resume, with civilians, as always, the primary victims. Belgium therefore calls on all actors, and Hamas in particular, to work urgently to prolong the truce in order to ensure the critical normalization of the security, humanitarian, economic and political situations to which the populations involved legitimately aspire. In that context, we join the Quartet in supporting the efforts of Egypt to achieve inter-Palestinian reconciliation and the release of Corporal Shalit.

At the international level, the past year has seen a remarkable intensification of the international and regional support that was already manifest in the largely positive response to the Annapolis meeting. Belgium and its European partners contributed their political and economic support for the Palestinian Authority at the meetings in Paris, London, Berlin and Bethlehem. Through the European Union, we also participated in the Quartet, whose five summit meetings in one year reflect greater political commitment. Belgium supports a broader role for the Quartet in following up the parties' implementation of their commitments. We also welcome the regular involvement in its meetings of members of the Follow-up Committee on the Arab Peace Initiative.

Desirous of greater international involvement in that promising yet fragile process, Belgium will vote in favour of the draft resolution prepared by the United States and Russia.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I thank you, Sir, for convening this ministerial meeting of the Security Council. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his introductory remarks and to acknowledge the presence of the Deputy Secretary-General.

At the outset, I wish to express my Government's support for the draft resolution prepared by the United States of America and the Russian Federation.

The Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are now entering a delicate phase. We respect the will of both sides to keep them confidential, and we support their resolve, as shown during their meeting with the Quartet in Sharm el-Sheikh, to continue responsibly, despite the existing difficulties. It is absolutely essential that a comprehensive agreement be reached in the form of a peace treaty to be implemented without further negotiation.

We are aware that there are still considerable gaps between the parties' positions on a number of core issues, but we believe that, now more than ever, the Israelis and the Palestinians need clear and specific solutions, not vague principles that can lead to future disputes. The Road Map and the Annapolis conference have given us the means to continue along the path we have taken, and we are convinced that the ongoing political process must become irreversible. It is essential for the Quartet to play a more incisive role in monitoring the implementation of the parties' commitments on the ground.

Against that backdrop, Italy remains convinced that the European Union, in reiterating the need to leave the primary responsibility for the conduct of the negotiations to the parties, will not hesitate to offer its support for the implementation of a final peace agreement at the appropriate time. At the same time, we believe it fundamental to continue to contribute to strengthening the Palestinian institutions and to building their capacities through the promotion of economic development and institutional and security sector reform. Israel's security and a just conclusion of the peace process based on the two-State solution can be assured only by a future Palestinian State with sound institutions that operate in accordance with the rule of law and good governance.

We believe that the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a high priority in the fragile regional framework, but it is equally important to support and promote a constructive approach by all the States of the region to every track of the peace process. We welcome and encourage the involvement of the League of Arab States and its members in support of the Palestinian Authority and of President Abbas, both economically and politically. In that context, the Arab League's Peace Initiative has great potential, which should be exploited and developed in coordination with all the stakeholders.

We are concerned by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the ongoing violence in the areas bordering Israel. It is urgent that calm be restored and maintained and that the border crossings be reopened to allow the people to

have access to goods and services. The acceleration in the building of settlements and the episodes of settler violence against Israeli officers and Palestinian civilians in recent days are a cause of further concern.

We welcome the courageous decision of the Israeli authorities to prevent further violence and to evacuate the illegal settlements. We encourage Israel to continue along that path in the shared awareness that the expansion of settlements, particularly in East Jerusalem, does not facilitate dialogue, but instead undermines the credibility of Palestinian negotiators in the eyes of public opinion.

The President: It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam

Against:

None

Abstaining:

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

The President: There were 13 votes in favour, none against and 1 abstention. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 1850 (2008).

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.